United Nations S/2000/879

Security Council

Distr.: General
18 September 2000

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 15 of Security Council resolution 1298 (2000) of 17 May 2000, in which the Council requested me, inter alia, to submit, every 60 days after the date of the adoption of the resolution, a report on its implementation and on the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

2. The present report provides an update on political and humanitarian developments since my report of 9 August 2000 (S/2000/785). It also describes the status of the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), as authorized by the Security Council in resolution 1312 (2000) of 31 July 2000.

II. Political developments

3. According to the communiqué issued on 12 June 2000 by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (S/2000/560), the proximity talks between Ethiopia and Eritrea that resumed in Algiers on 30 May 2000, and subsequently led to the signing of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities between the two countries on 18 June 2000, had been intended to resolve the practical aspects of the implementation of the peace plan. The plan was to begin with the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from positions taken by them since 6 February 1999 and end with the settlement of the border dispute through delimitation and demarcation and, if necessary, through arbitration. However, at Ethiopia's request and with Eritrea's consent, it had been agreed to first finalize a cessation of hostilities agreement and then negotiate and finalize a second agreement on the other outstanding issues.

4. In accordance with the decision taken by OAU at its recent summit in Lomé, the President of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, is assessing the best timing for the resumption of the proximity talks under the auspices of OAU, with due consideration to progress in the deployment of UNMEE.

5. The Committee established pursuant to resolution 1298 (2000) to monitor the implementation of the measures imposed against Ethiopia and Eritrea in paragraph 6 of the resolution agreed to elect Ambassador Hasmy Agam (Malaysia) as Chairman and Argentina and Tunisia as Vice-Chairmen of the Committee until 31 December 2000. Currently, the Committee is in the process of finalizing the guidelines for the conduct of its work. In paragraph 11 of resolution 1298 (2000), States were requested to report in detail to the Secretary-General within 30 days of its adoption on the specific steps they had taken to give effect to the measures imposed against Ethiopia and Eritrea. As at 15 September 2000, 36 States had submitted their reports, which had been issued as documents of the Committee.

III. Humanitarian developments

Ethiopia

6. In January 2000, the Government of Ethiopia and the United Nations country team estimated that 349,837 people had been displaced as a result of the conflict in the northern regions of Tigray and Afar. While most of those internally displaced persons were accommodated in host communities, local basic infrastructure was insufficient to support their

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presence. Since the signing of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, the situation has changed significantly for those persons, and many of them have had the opportunity to return to their places of origin. According to the Government of Ethiopia, approximately 30 per cent of them have started rebuilding their lives in their hometowns since last August.

7. The returning internally displaced persons need assistance in practically all sectors, as most of them lost their possessions in the conflict. Their return is a cause for major concern because a number of areas of return are located in former war zones and are, in many cases, heavily mined. The presence of mines also negatively affects the implementation of development assistance programmes.

8. The complex emergency situation in Ethiopia is further exacerbated by the drought, which has left over 10 million people in need of emergency food assistance, including over 1.4 million children under 5 years of age. While the situation in the Somali region continues to be a source of concern, the overall donor response for both food and non-food needs has helped to prevent the crisis from degenerating into a famine. However, people are still dying of drought-related illnesses, and it is therefore imperative to deliver non-food items such as medicine, water and sanitation.

9. In support of the Government's appeal released in January 2000, the United Nations country team in Ethiopia issued a relief action plan for internally displaced persons requesting $27.5 million in combined food and non-food assistance. As of June 2000, donor response to this request amounted to $19.7 million. Eighty per cent of the food requirements were met, but only 22 per cent of the non-food items were funded. The non-food activities include construction and rehabilitation of water points, emergency education assistance, provision of medical supplies, distribution of shelter materials and mine risk education.

Eritrea

10. Since the signing of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities on 18 June 2000, a number of important changes have occurred in the humanitarian situation in Eritrea. With the improvement of security conditions, the past three months have witnessed the return of some 400,000 internally displaced persons to their areas of origin located in accessible and relatively safe parts of the administrative zones bordering Ethiopia. Furthermore, the repatriation of Eritrean refugees from the Sudan, organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Governments of Eritrea and the Sudan, has continued on a weekly basis. Of 94,000 refugees, a total of 23,881 have returned under this repatriation operation, while an estimated 25,000 have returned spontaneously.

11. While the return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their places of origin constitutes a positive development, many of the returnees will continue to need humanitarian assistance. Food aid on an ongoing basis will be required since much of the planting season has been missed and normal economic activities in war-affected areas have been severely disrupted. Furthermore, shelter materials and household items are needed in view of the destruction of homes and household assets in certain areas. There is also a need to re-establish basic infrastructure and social services in these areas of return. It is equally essential to support income-generating and productive capacities through the provision of agricultural implements to farmers and of microcredit to small entrepreneurs.

12. At present, there are still over 200,000 internally displaced persons accommodated in camps and other settlements in the northern Red Sea, Gash Barka and Debub zones. These persons cannot currently return to their original homes because of security concerns or the lack of resources to re-establish their lives. As long as they remain in camps, they will continue to require a wide array of vital humanitarian services, including the delivery of emergency food assistance, health, shelter and household items, and water and sanitation.

13. In addition, a substantial number of internally displaced persons continue to be accommodated in host communities. The plight of these persons and their host families, who have been sharing their meagre resources with an additional number of people for the past few months, requires continued attention from the humanitarian community. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that the most fertile agricultural areas have been affected by both war and drought.

14. Over the past few months, an increasing number of humanitarian agencies have arrived in Eritrea to assist the Government in providing emergency relief assistance to populations in need. On 10 June 2000, the

Government of Eritrea issued a new appeal for $183 million for emergency humanitarian assistance to some 1.6 million people affected by the war and drought, as well as to the urban poor and affected host communities. The appeal is to cover the period until the end of the year. In response to the Government appeal, the United Nations country team in Eritrea issued a revised United Nations appeal last July. The appeal has a total value of $87.3 million and addresses the priority humanitarian needs among over 1 million war-affected Eritreans. The donor response to the food aid component of the revised United Nations country team appeal has been very positive so far. Regrettably, the donor pledges and contributions have been less than expected for other critical interventions in sectors such as health, nutrition, water and sanitation, social services and agriculture.

IV. Status of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea

15. Since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1312 (2000) establishing the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, active preparations have continued for the deployment of both the first group of 100 military observers and the necessary civilian support staff to Ethiopia and Eritrea.

16. The United Nations military liaison officers, who were dispatched to Addis Ababa and Asmara (five in each capital) at the outset of the Mission, have undertaken, in close cooperation with the parties, field visits to military positions of Ethiopia and Eritrea, and established contacts with key civilian and military authorities.

17. Accompanied by the Mission logistics team, United Nations liaison officers have also completed a survey of potential deployment areas in both countries. As a result, locations for liaison functions with Ethiopian and Eritrean military headquarters at the front positions have been identified and a deployment timetable for military observers has been prepared. According to the timetable, a total of 46 military observers (23 at Addis Ababa and 23 at Asmara) will assemble for comprehensive four-day training sessions, to be followed by deployment to operational positions in both countries later this month. The induction of the military personnel began on 13 September. The second group of military observers are to be dispatched to the Mission area around mid-October 2000.

18. In anticipation of the adoption by the Security Council on 15 September 2000 of resolution 1320 (2000), authorizing the deployment of phase III of the Mission, the draft status-of-forces agreements to be concluded between the United Nations and Ethiopia and Eritrea, respectively, were transmitted to the two Governments.

Logistics

19. In the meantime, logistical build-up for the new mission has also continued, with the arrival of supplies and equipment from the United Nations Logistics Base at Brindisi, Italy. The opening of direct air and road corridors between the two countries for the use of United Nations flights and convoys will be of critical importance to Mission operations, and the United Nations is actively pursuing this issue. The Organization has also started dispatching the necessary civilian support staff, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1312 (2000). To date, a total of 37 civilian support personnel have arrived in the Mission area. As a result of these efforts, UNMEE has already established functioning offices at Addis Ababa and Asmara.

20. Both parties have extended their cooperation in this regard. The United Nations Liaison Office to OAU and the representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have also played an invaluable role in setting up the new mission. At the same time, the United Nations has continued to maintain close contact with OAU, in particular regarding issues related to logistical support for the military liaison officers to be designated by OAU.

Mine action

21. Pursuant to the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities and Security Council resolution 1312 (2000), the United Nations is launching a multi-component mine action programme to assist the Governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea. To this end, a Mine Action Coordination Office is being established within the UNMEE structure. The purpose of the Office is to record and process information related to mines and unexploded ordnance, set priorities for mine action, assign tasks to operators, and supervise their activities. To accurately ascertain the extent of the

landmine problem, a rapid landmine/unexploded ordnance survey will be conducted by a United Kingdom non-governmental organization, the Halo Trust, and coordinated by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Survey teams from the Halo Trust have already arrived in the Mission area and will start assessing relevant areas, with the aim of completing the survey by mid-December 2000. In the meantime, mine awareness for the returning population is provided by the United Nations Children's Fund and UNHCR.

22. The overall requirements for mine clearance in the temporary security zone will be determined on the basis of the survey described above. Both the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities and Security Council resolution 1312 (2000) envisage a crucial role for the parties' armed forces in mine clearance. This requires that the two countries proceed with mine lifting as soon as possible and carry out this exercise in a coordinated manner, and comply with international standards for humanitarian mine clearance. Any postponement in mine clearance would affect the deployment of United Nations military observers and troops and the early establishment of the temporary security zone.

23. Local capacity-building through training and assistance provided by the international community will be required to reach the objectives set out above. The overreaching aim of the United Nations is to assist the parties in accomplishing these important goals, in line with its policy on mine action, which confers on UNDP the leading role in assisting Member States in national mine action capacity-building. These efforts will be funded by voluntary contributions; and I appeal to the donor community to strongly support this vital area of United Nations activities.

V. Observations

24. To date, the Governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea have shown commitment to ensuring the implementation of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities signed at Algiers on 18 June 2000 and I should like to commend them for that.

25. Since the establishment of UNMEE pursuant to Security Council resolution 1312 (2000), the United Nations has pursued every effort to expedite the deployment of the first group of military observers and the necessary civilian support staff to Ethiopia and Eritrea, in anticipation of the peacekeeping operation authorized by the Council in its resolution 1320 (2000). Pursuant to that resolution, I intend to nominate a Special Representative and a Force Commander in the very near future.

26. The cooperation extended to the United Nations by both Governments has facilitated the establishment of the UNMEE offices, as well as the conduct of field surveys and other preparations for the Mission's deployment. I count on the parties to continue to cooperate closely with the Mission in the implementation of its mandate, in particular in the expeditious establishment of the temporary security zone, and the earliest possible start of mine-clearance, which is essential for UNMEE to commence its work in the relevant zones. I also call on all Member States which have the capacity to do so to provide this important Mission with all the military personnel, equipment and other resources necessary for the fulfilment of its mandate.

27. While the security conditions in the contested zones have improved, the humanitarian situation remains a cause for major concern. The donor pledges and contributions for critical interventions in key sectors have fallen short of expectations thus far. I therefore urge the international donor community to respond generously to the United Nations country team requests for humanitarian assistance in the two countries. I count on both Governments to continue to exercise every restraint in order to prevent any further deterioration of the humanitarian and human rights situation.

28. I am concerned by the continuing mutual accusations of human rights abuses by the two countries even after the signing of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities. In this regard, I have written to the President of Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki, and the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, and indicated that I had asked the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide me with recommendations on how the United Nations might be of assistance in addressing pressing human rights issues. After discussing this matter with both parties, I intend to establish a small component within UNMEE to follow human rights issues. I also called on both leaders to exercise restraint in sustaining the momentum for peace created by the signing of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities.